

TOWN OF JOHNSON

P.O. BOX 383
JOHNSON, VERMONT 05656
(802) 635-2611 • FAX (802) 635-9523

December 9, 2003

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Section of Environmental Analysis
Surface Transportation Board
Room 500
1925 K Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20423-0001

AB 444 (SUB-NO. 1X)

Re: *Lamoille Valley R.R. Co. – Abandonment Exemption – In Caledonia, Washington, Orleans, Lamoille, and Franklin Counties, Vermont*
Surface Transportation Board, Docket No. AB-44 (Sub-No. 1X)

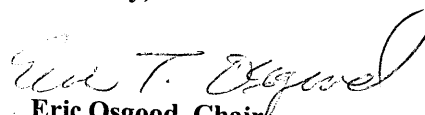
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am the Chairman of the Select board for the Town of Johnson. On March 23, 2001 Daryl West, representing the Johnson Select board I sent the attached letter to Sanford Woodbeck of the Lamoille Valley Recreation Trail Committee. On behalf of the Town of Johnson, I am writing in support of a regulatory exemption allowing the Lamoille Valley Railroad Company (LVRC) to abandon its 95.26-mile-long railroad line between St. Johnsbury and Swanton, Vermont.

In the early 1970s, this line was purchased by the State of Vermont and thereafter extensively rehabilitated with a heavy infusion of federal and state funds. From 1978 through 1990, LVRC was controlled by dedicated group of local investors who struggled heroically to operate a successful short-line railroad. In the end, the obstacles were too great: (1) the loss of overhead "bridge" traffic from the Maine Central's Mountain Division, (2) the closure of talc mine and mill in my community, Johnson, and of the Lowell/Eden asbestos mines, once the principal sources of the line's originating traffic, and (3) the long-term decline of farming along the line, which eroded the market for the bulk shipments of animal feed that were once the mainstay of the line's terminating traffic. In the mid-1990s, heavy flood damage to the line, which would cost millions of dollars to repair, ended any practical possibility of resuming railroad service. At several recent sessions, the Vermont legislature has made it very clear that it has no appetite for the heavy financial commitment that would be necessary to restore this line to railroad operation.

However deep the pangs of nostalgia, the time has come to recognize that the public interest would be best served by the Board's approving the requested regulatory exemption. As expressed in the Johnson Select boards letter of March 23, 2001, the economic interests of the Town of Johnson would be best served by use as a trail. This would allow the LVRC to surrender its leasehold, opening the way for the State of Vermont, as the line's owner, to make segments of the corridor available to municipalities, snowmobile clubs, and other responsible organizations for trail use.

Sincerely,


Eric Osgood, Chair
Johnson Select board

cc: Mr. James B. Fitzgerald
Lamoille Valley Railroad Company
c/o VTrans Rail Section
National Life Building
Drawer 33
Montpelier, VT 05633-5001

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March 23, 2001

Lamoille Valley Recreation Trail Committee
Mr. Sanford Woodbeck
1811 Horn of the Moon Road
Montpelier, VT 05602

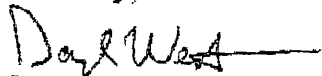
Dear Mr. Woodbeck,

The Johnson Select Board has reviewed the information regarding the use of the Lamoille Valley railroad corridor. We have considered both positive and negative impacts of using the corridor for a railroad or a recreation trail.

Johnson is a residential community that has limited potential for major commercial expansion. We feel that a Railroad would not benefit the economy of our community nearly as much as a recreation trail would.

Being a rural college community, the growth of Johnson is dependent on a variety of recreation / tourism based activities. We are in the process of developing local recreation areas that would very nicely tie into the Lamoille Valley Recreation Trail system, and therefore the Johnson Select Board would like to express support for the proposed trail system.

Sincerely,



Darrel West

Johnson Select Board